

HAVE WE TO RECKON WITH A SPECIAL PHANTOM-FORMING PREDISPOSITION?

by G. ZORAB

IT is, I feel, justifiable to state that apparitions of the living, the dying and the dead, the *out-of-the-body*, the *descent-into-Hades* experiences and those connected with perceiving one's own phantom (the so-called doppelganger) should be regarded as purely subjective; that is to say that all such impressions and sensations well up from the same source that is responsible for the projection of our dream-images. These seem to be of the same nature as the many kinds of hallucination that the insane and the sane alike may experience. Even if such hallucinatory impressions are veridical (in hallucinatory images and sensations connected with ESP impressions, providing knowledge that the hallucinated could not have obtained by 'normal' means) then the image itself must still be regarded as subjective.

Even if one agrees wholeheartedly with the above statement, it might be asked whether a few very rare cases could be found that reportedly mention experiences in which the apparition perceived possessed a more objective, and material character. Now, D. D. Home's phenomena, of more than a century ago, still possess enough evidential value to be cited. His manifestations were often produced under observational conditions as good as could be desired in the middle of the nineteenth century, and certainly incomparably better than those to be encountered in most other sittings with allegedly physical mediums then or later.

We have quite a number of reports mentioning the appearance during Home's sittings of materialized hands, arms, fingers, etc. What seemed to be phantoms, giving the impression of being complete human figures, however, appear to have been rare¹; most of them are described in the Earl of Dunraven's report (3).

A really spectacular phantom apparently collectively observed by several witnesses and not described in this report, appeared on May 7th, 1873, and W. Stainton-Moses who witnessed the

¹ In 1854, at the age of 21, Home for the first time during his sojourn in the United States went to Boston where he stayed with the art-loving family of Mr and Mrs D. Jarves, friends of the Brownings. Here his mediumistic powers very much increased and *complete phantom forms*, not merely hands, began to appear. 'Spirits were distinctly seen by all present in the room, and more than once they kissed persons present so as to be both felt and heard' (2, p. 48).

manifestation noted his impressions in his diary.¹ Other witnesses were Mr and Mrs W. Crookes, Sergeant Cox, Mr and Mrs D. D. Home and Miss Douglas, in whose house the phenomena occurred. Stainton-Moses' account reads:

Mr Home now rose from his chair, and . . . went into the inner dining-room, taking the accordion with him, and placing it on the dinner-waggon. The fire-light was lowered; the reading-lamp was put out of the room; the gas behind the window at the end of the room was lowered, and we sat in gloom; the window at the end showing out in bold relief. During the evening Mr Home stood near the fireplace, and kept us informed of his position. 'Now Dan is here; now Dan is touching the, etc., etc.' We all saw a hand descend from the top of the curtain and play the accordion. It was a large hand, and its reflection on the window blind was strong. After this a head showed in a similar way. When Mrs Crookes was told to go into the room and occupy the chair marked in the plan (9, p. 309), a form was materialized as far as the middle. It floated near the folding doors, and advanced towards Mrs Crookes, who screamed and it vanished (9, p. 310).

About twenty years later F. W. H. Myers showed this diary entry to Mrs Crookes who supplied him with the following comments in a letter dated March 9th, 1893.

This is an accurate account as far as it goes of one of the most interesting séances I ever had with Mr Home, and I have on several occasions recounted the incidents to my friends. When Mr Home took me by the hand and led me into the back dining-room he placed me in a chair at the side of the window and carving-table (not dinner-waggon), and facing the party in the other room. The window had ground glass in it, no blind, and the gas behind was bright enough to show everything in

¹ The later Sir William Crookes, the famous physicist, who was present at the above quoted seance, mentioned that remarkable manifestation of the phantom-form in a publication only a few months after the events in his *Quarterly Journal of Science* for January 1874 (p. 105). Crookes writes:

'In the dusk of the evening, during a *séance* with Mr Home at my house, the curtains of a window about eight feet from Mr Home were seen to move. A dark shadowy semi-transparent form, like that of a man, was then seen by all present standing near the window, waving the curtain with his hand. As we looked the form faded away and the curtains ceased to move.'

The following is a still more striking instance [of phantom forms]. As in the former case, Mr Home was the medium. A phantom form came from a corner of the room, took an accordion in its hand, and then glided about the room playing the instrument. The form was visible to all present for many minutes, Mr Home also being seen at the same time. Coming rather close to a lady who was sitting apart from the rest of the company, she gave a slight cry, upon which it vanished.'

the room distinctly. Mr Home then left me and stood between the two rooms. The accordion was immediately taken from his hand by a cloudy appearance, which soon seemed to condense into a distinct human form, clothed in a filmy drapery, standing near Mr Home between the two rooms. The accordion began to play (I do not remember whether on this occasion there was any recognized melody), and the figure gradually advanced towards me till it almost touched me, playing continuously. It was semi-transparent, and I could see the sitters through it all the time. Mr Home remained near the sliding doors. As the figure approached I felt an intense cold, getting stronger as it got nearer, and as it was giving me the accordion I could not help screaming. The figure immediately seemed to sink into the floor to the waist, leaving only the head and shoulders visible, still playing the accordion, which was then about a foot off the floor. Mr Home and my husband came to me at once, and I have no clear recollection of what then occurred, except that the accordion did not cease playing immediately.

Mr Sergeant Cox was rather angry at my want of nerve, and exclaimed: 'Mrs Crookes, you have spoilt the finest manifestation we have ever had.' I have always regretted that my want of presence of mind brought the phenomena to so abrupt a termination (9, pp. 310-11).

The phenomena described above show several unique features with regard to the phantom perceived, for most of the 'spirit' forms reported to have been observed in connection with Home's mediumship are mentioned as 'shadowy' (4, p. 49), 'luminous forms' (3, p. 92), 'a perfectly white column' (4, p. 83), etc., etc. The 'spirit forms' reported in (4) were not invariably seen by everybody present. Several times such phantoms or phantom-like figures were only perceived by one or two of the sitters, while the others, though in a position to do so, did not see anything of the kind. The appearance of 'spirit hands, arms', etc. seem to have followed the same pattern of variable visibility, for many times these so-called materializations were perceptible to one or more sitters, remaining invisible to others at the same seance.¹

¹ Some who assisted in writing this article believed that when I remarked that several times at Home's sittings some sitters saw the so-called spirit hands, arms, etc., while others present and in the position to do so did not, it was my conclusion that in such cases the forms perceived should be regarded as of a purely subjective nature, without any objectivity. I never meant to argue that point, since I do not know what to think of the processes involved. But I do want to point out that that was precisely the criterion applied by the early ESP investigators (Myers, Podmore, Gurney, etc.) who concluded that the Cheltenham ghost was subjective (7) because e.g. Miss Morton's parents did not see the apparition though their daughter did when the three were standing together in the same room. Also the fact that the apparition when

I feel that 'spirit hands' and 'spirit forms' (materializations of human limbs and completely formed human figures) should probably be regarded, not as paranormal phenomena belonging to different categories but just as variations of the same type of psi phenomena. In fact differing from one another as little as a complete levitation of say a table or that of Home himself differs from the transportation across the seance-room of a chair or sofa. The latter are psychokinetic (PK) phenomena but 'spirit hands' and 'spirit forms' belong to the category of *materializations* a phrase denoting a group of phenomena so far not generally accepted by modern parapsychology. This is because to date no such scientific tests have been conducted to prove its existence as have been done with regard to ESP and PK.

According to Mrs Crookes' account the collectively viewed phantom condensed out of a cloudy appearance into a distinct human form, clad in a filmy drapery. Further, in spite of that drapery it was apparently semi-transparent, for Mrs Crookes could see the other sitters (at maybe 4 to 5 yards distance) through it. It may well be that the apparition's head and shoulders were less transparent than the rest of its body, for Mr Stainton-Moses did not mention anything about the phantom's transparency.

Here the question may be raised: What or whom did the phantom represent? Was it some deceased person returned to the realm of mortal men? Or was it an elemental spirit, a gnome, a fairy, etc.? No answer is forthcoming but it is probable that the phantom produced at this London sitting with Home as the medium should be regarded as the fruit of Home's physical mediumistic powers; that is that Home was in possession of a special phantom-forming disposition as a part of his psi-faculties.

The same can be said of Home's apparently more solid materializations of arms, hands, fingers, etc. (15). These simulacra observed at many Home sittings varied from a small child's hand to the large, powerful hand of a man. There also appeared amorphous masses which bulged up the table-cloth under which they formed. All such manifestations in my opinion are best regarded as produced by Home's own extensive psi powers, and not as the work of supernatural entities doing the job with Home's assistance. In view of modern parapsychological findings I feel justified in concluding that the living Home himself was the source of these phenomena, in the same way as he should be regarded as the field-of-force producing the powerful PK

Miss Morton cornered it suddenly vanished through a stone wall strengthened the S.P.R. pioneers' opinion that the Cheltenham ghost was a subjectively perceived image, only seen by the observer's mind-eye.

manifestations and remarkable ESP phenomena that so greatly impressed the public during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Now, if it may be considered a fact that Home himself was responsible not only for the PK phenomena reported but also for the phantom manifestations at his many sittings, then it stands to reason that other human beings too may possess such faculties, just as other persons have been known to demonstrate their PK and ESP gifts.

Some cases have been reported in which persons seem to have projected a 'phantom double', which was seen by others under circumstances giving the impressions that the figure perceived was not wholly subjective, but possessed something concrete, taking up space, just as, on the face of it, Home's phantom did. A rather well-known and well-attested case is that of Mr S.H.B. and the ladies Verity who were witnesses of the former's phantom appearing in their house (5, vol. I, pp. 104-09; 9, vol. I, pp. 292-96).

Mr S.H.B. by an act of will—so he believed—projected himself (or rather his 'double', soul, 'astral body' or any other term which one might use to denote this unknown quantity) into the bedroom of the ladies Verity, who lived some three miles from his own home. These experiments took place during the evening and night. Two of the ladies collectively perceived him standing in the room dressed in evening dress. A married sister (Mrs H.L., née Verity), who had only met Mr S.H.B. once or twice, and who by chance visited her parents that day and stayed the night also perceived the phantom. When she saw it walking about in her bedroom she at once recognised it to be Mr S.H.B. When she lay down on her bed the apparition came up to her, took her long hair in *his* hand, and after that grasped *her* hand, gazing into it as if attempting to read her fortune.

According to the writers of the *Phantasms* (5) the case is well-evidenced, and I feel that we may accept the testimony of the ladies Verity as to their having seen the apparition under the conditions described.

Another case pointing to a special phantom-forming disposition is that of Mrs Stone (5, vol. II, p. 85). It looks as if one or two of her apparitions were of a more objective nature, though her first out-of-the-body experience seems to have been purely subjective when she 'saw' her alive and conscious body so to say through the eyes of her phantom standing a few yards away from it. She reported:

When about 9 or 10 years old I was sent to school in Dorchester as a

day boarder. It was here my first curious experience occurred. . . . I was in an upper room in the school, standing with some others, in a class opposite our teacher. . . . Suddenly I found myself by her side, and looking towards the class saw myself distinctly—a pale, slim girl in a white frock and pinafore (5, vol. II, p. 85, note 1).

The above case is as far as I am aware unique, since no other such an occurrence is on record, i.e. whereby a person in a state of waking consciousness had an out-of-the-body experience, perceiving his natural body from close by. The reverse phenomenon, however, that is to say, the viewing of one's phantom while the perceiving person is wide-awake, is not a rare occurrence and is in the majority of the reported cases connected with psychopathological personalities (see for a number of examples (11, pp. 185-97)). Another curious feature of the Stone case is its possible genetic basis, for Gurney remarks: 'I may mention that Mrs Stone's daughter has had a similar experience, so that here is perhaps another example of hereditary tendency.'¹

It may be assumed, I think, that Mrs Stone's childhood experience was purely subjective, existing only in her own mind, since there is no evidence that either the teacher, at whose side the girl's phantom was believed to stand, nor any of her class-mates perceived her phantom presence. The situation, however, may take another aspect when Mrs Stone's 'double' was seen by other persons. This suggests that such observers were in contact with something more objective than a mental image. I feel that this is the case in the following circumstances:

On three occasions, each time by different persons, I (Mrs Stone) have been seen when not present in the body. The first instance that I was thus seen was by my sister-in-law, who was sitting up with me, the night after the birth of my first child. She looked towards the bed where I was sleeping, and distinctly saw me and my double; the first my natural body, the second spiritualized and fainter; several times she shut her eyes, but on opening them there was still the same appearance, and the vision only faded away after some time. She thought it was a sign of my death. I did not hear of it for many months (5, vol. II, p. 85).

Now, several cases have been recorded in medical literature of people in a disturbed mental condition or suffering from brain lesions and other complaints experiencing hallucinations of seeing

¹ If in future we should be able to collect more of such instances of hereditary tendencies governing such experiences, it would certainly allow us a better insight in the nature, origin, and development of the processes involved bringing about these out-of-the-body sensations.

or feeling their 'double' (6). But as far as I know such a doppelganger has never been seen by somebody else, at least if we keep ourselves to modern reports. Over the ages, on the other hand, such perceiving of one's 'double' must have happened many times, for the folklore of several European countries agrees that the seeing of a double by other persons spells certain death for the person whose 'double' is observed.

Taken in a general sense, there is little doubt that to see one's own doppelganger or to experience sensations and perceptions of the same kind must be regarded as purely subjective and hallucinatory. However, in the case of Mrs Stone whose 'double' was observed when she was very ill after childbirth the circumstances seem to have been somewhat different and may support to the hypothesis that there was somewhat more objectivity in the perceived phantom-form, i.e. that Mrs Stone's sister-in-law was not simply hallucinated when she believed she saw Mrs Stone's double, but that she did indeed perceive something present in time and space.

The same could have been the case in another appearance of Mrs Stone's 'ghost':

The third instance was by my niece; she was staying with us at Dorchester. It was rather early on a spring morning; she opened her bedroom door, and saw me ascending the flight of steps opposite her room, fully dressed in the mourning black gown, white collar, and cap, which I was then wearing for my mother-in-law. She did not speak, but saw me as she thought, go into the nursery. At breakfast she said to her uncle, 'My aunt was up early this morning. I saw her go into the nursery.'

'Oh! no, Jane,' my husband answered, 'she was not very well, and is going to have her breakfast before coming down' (5, vol. II, p. 85).

The third time Mrs Stone's phantom was seen it was more in the nature of a crisis-apparition. She was seen by the caretaker of a country-house near the sea, that she dearly loved. The caretaker, a thoroughly trustworthy woman, clearly recognised Mrs Stone in white garments and looking very pale and worn. At that very moment Mrs Stone in her Dorchester house was very faint, and lingered on for many weeks between life and death (5, vol. II, p. 85).

The type of phenomena quoted above, in which a certain person is seen more than once at places and in situations where his natural body could not have been at the time, has repeatedly been reported in the course of the last two hundred years. An often quoted case of this kind is that of *Miss Emilie Sagée*, a French

teacher at the Livonia boarding school for young girls (1842). Miss Sagée's double was seen several times by her pupils, a sight that scared them to death (1, vol. II, pp. 593-603). I do admit that the Sagée case is not so well attested (it is not first-hand) as we should consider necessary in accordance with our present-day standards of evidence. But there is little doubt that the case does resemble in its general features several other well-evidenced ones, so that we may take it into account as supporting our hypothesis of a possibly existing special phantom-forming predisposition. Whether we have to accept as an authentic item what is said about the Sagée doppelganger's resilience when touched, and therefore giving the impression that the double possessed a certain materiality, is a question that can no longer be answered with any degree of certainty.

Another better evidenced case of the same kind is that quoted in *Phantasms* (5, vol. II, pp. 78-81), and covering a period of some thirty years (1845-77). The doppelganger of the lady in question was perceived by several persons, once even collectively. I believe that one could multiply the examples already quoted of somebody's doppelganger or fetch being perceived in all sorts of ways and in various circumstances and conditions by sane persons who were in a normal waking state and fully conscious. Such an accumulation of case-material seems to provide some support for the hypothesis that certain persons may possess a phantom-building faculty, in the same manner as a number of persons are known to be gifted with a predisposition for producing ESP and PK phenomena.

Once it is taken into account that we may have to reckon with a special phantom-forming predisposition¹ the question may be raised if certain collectively perceived apparitions of the living, the dying or the dead should not be conceived as the product of the phantom-projecting faculty of some living person present or absent. Such a conception would suggest that certain reported

¹ I would like to suggest that the still hypothetical phantom-forming predisposition may in a way be comparable to the light-producing predisposition observable, e.g. in the well-evidenced case of 'The luminous woman of Pirano' (a town near Trieste, Italy). During her sleep this woman (42, mother of six children) produced in the region of her heart such a glow of light that her face became fully illuminated. Several medical doctors were able to observe the phenomenon more than once (13).

It seems to me that there is only a difference of degree between producing light and producing phantomlike forms. One should also consider the fact that D. D. Home and some other mediums have produced paranormal light phenomena as well as those indicating phantom-like structures.

cases of apparitions seemingly showing symptoms of possessing an objective nature, i.e. of solidity, could well fall within the category of the phantom-producing faculty of certain individuals, and that they therefore should not be regarded as the result of e.g. ESP induction, or as more or less materialized 'astral bodies', 'etheric doubles' of living or deceased persons.¹

Regarded from this point of view, it could well be that e.g. the famous haunting of the 'Lady in Black' at Cheltenham (7), and that remarkable apparition of Mr P.'s father (8, pp. 26-9) were brought about by the phantom-projecting faculty of the living agents concerned (Miss Morton and Mr P. himself) (14). There is of course little doubt that maybe 99.99% of all apparitions, either of the crisis-type or under other circumstances, are of a purely mental, subjective nature, just as about the same percentage of table-tilting phenomena should be considered as resulting from a kind of motor-automatism; but some tables and other devices are known to have been activated by PK. Looked at from this same angle, a number of apparitions may have been of a more substantial, objective nature, than that of a purely mental image.

THE PROBLEM OF APPARITIONAL CLOTHING

When assessing the nature and origin of the various reported apparitions with which they had to deal, the writers of the *Phantasms* (5) based themselves on the point of view that *dressed* apparitions, carrying hats, walking sticks, frock-coats and so on (a naked apparition is unknown in Europe!) should be considered indisputable proof that such apparitions were as subjective and immaterial as dream-images, hallucinatory impressions, etc. What they termed a veridical hallucination could stand in some relation with a real event or object normally unknown to the percipient, but its hallucinatory character remained unchanged. And if an apparition thus perceived appeared to be dressed according to the fashion of its time or otherwise, it was, so they argued, another sure sign of its purely subjective nature, having no real existence in the physical world.

Does this argument hold water in every case? For instance, if we take it that the phantom seen by Mr and Mrs Crookes, Stainton-Moses, etc., was not a hallucination but something

¹ The conception of 'an astral or etheric body' derived from the Neo-Platonists is based on the idea that in our material body exists another body of ether, astral or fluid material, a complete replica of the mortal body and functioning as the vehicle of the human spirit or soul, carrier of the personality and consciousness.

possessing substantiality, and thus acting on the sitters' senses, we cannot get around the fact that the phantom was dressed, even if it is true that its clothing is described as a filmy drapery that appeared to be semi-transparent. Now, in my opinion it is only a step from a filmy drapery to Mr S.H.B.'s fetch appearing in evening dress to the ladies Verity.¹ In both cases there happened to be a collectively perceived phantom clothed in a manner that hid its nakedness (one wonders if phantoms are indeed in the nude when the clothing is removed!). In both cases a telepathic interpretation (e.g. one percipient or agent, so to say, infecting the others present by the same telepathically induced image or vision) seems difficult to maintain in the face of the facts, since in both examples the apparition is said to have handled physical objects, so giving the impression that it possessed some kind of massivity or physical power. Nevertheless, we are told that at a given moment Mrs Crookes' 'ghostlike' figure sank (dissolved?) into the floor, with only its head and shoulders remaining above the ground, while the accordion still held by the ghost's hands continued playing. There seems to be a discrepancy here between half of the apparition dissolving into nothing, but the other half retaining so much 'body' that it could hold up the accordion, probably weighing several pounds. This remarkable phenomenon might be understood, if we assume that the phantom, being a product of Home's mediumistic powers, did not really carry and play the accordion with the strength of its own arms and hands but that the musical instrument was upheld and carried along by Home's PK faculties. The same could have been the case when Home's 'spirit' hands and arms, sometimes adorned with a kind of muslin drapery, handled objects such as for instance a wreath (15, p. 234). Such objects could then well have been carried about by PK power, and not by the gripping 'muscles' of the phantom's hands and arms. On the other hand, reports exist that phantom hands shook hands with one or more sitters, and that the gripping was quite powerful.

In such cases it is not only the 'spirit hands' that were para-normally produced. Home's materialization faculties could also fabricate clothing stuff fitting around the arms as a loose sleeve. And however material the phantom human limbs and clothing apparently were, their physical nature did not prevent them from dissolving together into thin air at moment's notice (why such

¹ And Mr P.'s deceased father appearing to his son with a peaked cap that had so greatly impressed Mr P. when he was a boy. The apparition was dressed as a naval officer and it threw a shadow on the wall when passing a lighted lamp (8, p. 27-8).

sudden and complete disintegrations of materialized objects do not produce a kind of atom bomb explosion is a question a physicist should try to answer).

The point therefore I would like to make is that if a phantom-form suddenly disappears clean through a thick stone wall (as happened in the case of Mr and Mrs P.'s apparition, and that of Miss Morton's 'ghost'), this does not necessarily prove the apparition to be subjective. The same applies to the instances in which an apparition is seen by some persons and not by others in a position to do so, examples are the Morton 'ghost' which Miss Morton's parent never could see, although a dozen people did; and Home's 'spirit hands' and some of his full-form apparitions perceived by some and not by others at the same sitting).

In view of all this may I suggest that a number of apparitions seemingly of an objective nature could well be in some way physically structured and produced by the agency of the phantom-forming, phantom-projecting faculty of a living human being (some death-bed apparitions may well belong to this same category). On the other hand I would like to submit that a collectively perceived apparition, fetch, etc. need not imply support for the 'astral body' hypothesis; and also that the collectively viewed apparition of a deceased person should not necessarily be considered good evidence that this person's 'soul', 'spirit', 'ego', etc. has condensed itself into some physical appearance.

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